

Gallaudet, E. M.

Address in Behalf of the
Columbia Institution.



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AN ADDRESS

IN BEHALF OF THE

Columbia Institution

FOR THE

INSTRUCTION

OF

THE DEAF AND DUMB AND THE BLIND,

BY EDWARD M. GALLAUDET,
SUPERINTENDENT OF THE INSTITUTION.

DELIVERED IN THE OLD REPRESENTATIVES' HALL, THURSDAY EVENING Jan, 21, 1858

WASHINGTON:
HENRY POLKINHORN, PRINTER.
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OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

PATRON.

JAMES BUCHANAN, President of the United States.

President;

HON. AMOS KENDALL.

Secretary:

WILLIAM STICKNEY.

Treasurer:

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Directors:

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JUDSON MITCHELL, DAVID A. HALL,

REV. BYRON SUNDERLAND, D. D.

Superintendent:

EDWARD M. GALLAUDET.

Instructors:

JAMES DENISON,

MRS. MARIA M. EDDY,

Of the Deaf and Dumb.

Of the Blind.

Matron:

MRS. THOMAS H. GALLAUDET.

N O T E.

The COLUMBIA INSTITUTION FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF THE DEAF AND DUMB AND THE BLIND was incorporated by Congress February 16th, 1857, and commenced its operations in June of the same year.

It is designed for the benefit of persons residing in the District of Columbia, but receives also pupils from all parts of the country.

Indigent children of the District are supported by the Government of the United States; all others at the expense of their friends.

The first exhibition of the pupils of this institution to Congress and the public occurred January 21st, 1858, of which the following notice appeared in the Washington Union of the next day :

INTERESTING EXHIBITION.—The noble old hall of the House of Representatives was lighted up last evening, and at an early hour every seat upon the floor was occupied, and the galleries were crowded. It was the first public exhibition of the pupils of the Columbia Institution for the instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, who entered at the appointed hour, neatly dressed, and took seats around the Speaker's rostrum. Hon. Amos Kendall, President of the Institution, took the chair, and, by his invitation, the Hon. Jacob Thompson, Secretary of the Interior, took a seat at his side. Among the large audience there were many members of Congress, clergymen, and distinguished citizens, with several deaf mutes, who kept their fingers busily occupied in their pantomimic comments on the scene.

E. M. Gallaudet, Esq., the Principal of the Institution, delivered a brief, sensible, and eloquent address. He reviewed the gradual creation of institutions for the education of the deaf and dumb, and of the blind, in the various States, and then urged the claims of the institution here, which has been founded, and thus far sustained, by individual liberality, and now asks the aid of Congress.

Vocal and instrumental music followed, after which the deaf mutes gave representations of various passions, sentiments, &c., in obedience to the signs of their preceptor. A little fellow's personification of a snow storm was very comical, and a young girl's idea of an angel was extremely touching. Exercises on the black-board followed, in which some of the pupils evinced great proficiency in their studies.

The blind children contributed plaintive yet expressive music, read from the books printed in relief for their use, and added to the interest of the occasion. The exhibition can but add to the deep sympathy already felt for the institution, of which we shall soon have more to say.

A D D R E S S.

The education of deaf mutes and the blind, unknown in America at the commencement of the present century, is now so general and so well understood, that any argument to prove its necessity and feasibility is uncalled for.

The spirit of bigoted incredulity, which chilled the hearts and dampened the ardor of pioneers in this glorious work, has given place in the enlightened public mind to a hearty sympathy and co-operation, with all well-directed endeavors to ameliorate the condition of the unfortunate of every class; and there is now scarce a State in our National Confederacy but makes liberal provision for the maintenance and tuition of those of its children, to whom the senses of sight or hearing are, in the dispensation of a wise Providence, denied.

For many centuries after the Savior of mankind had loosed the tongue of the dumb and opened the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind, by his miraculous touch and voice, the sons and daughters of silence and darkness remained uncared for by their fellow mortals. They were born, they lived, they died. Thus, generation after generation, was their brief history written. Without education, without social privileges, without legal rights, without sympathy in this world, without hope for the future, they came on and passed off the stage of human action, with no place assigned them in the great drama of life.

Faintly at first dawned the light from the sun of intelligence on this neglected class across the Atlantic, and not until many years after portions of Europe were cheered by the slowly diffusing beams, was one found to attempt the promethean task of bringing the heavenly light to our own shores.

Forty years ago, in the home of the Puritans, by the quiet waters of the broad Connecticut, a little band of mutes gathered wonderingly around their teachers and—listened did I say? no—looked with

eager eyes for the words of wisdom which fell from the expressive fingers of their instructor.

On the very day that this school for deaf mutes was opened in New England: the Empire State, never second in works of benevolence and philanthropy, after months of persevering and faithful effort, perfected the organization of a similar institution; within whose stately walls, now towering above the highlands of the Hudson, are at present gathered a larger number of pupils than in any other establishment of the kind in this country, or the world.

Next, Pennsylvania bent favorably to the silent appeal of her unfortunate children; and, for now more than a quarter of a century, they have been blessed with the light of intelligence and education.

Then, westward over the mountains and across the broad prairies, the star of benevolence took its way; and with but short periods intervening, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee pronounced the sacred "Ephphatha" to the closed ears within their borders.

Meantime, the Old Dominion, with proverbial nobleness and generosity, was by no means tardy in acknowledging the claim to public charity of the deaf and dumb and the blind; but promptly opened a home for both these classes, where for years the beneficent bounty of the State has been freely and wisely dispensed.

Along the coast of the Atlantic and by the great gulf flashed the cheering light, dispelling all the social and moral darkness which enshrouded so many of God's creatures; and the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana rapidly joined in the good work of deaf mute instruction, their example being imitated up the father of rivers and away by the great lakes in the north and west, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan, establishing and sustaining asylums all now in satisfactory and flourishing condition.

Scarce had the lone star found its place in the constellation of our glorious republic, ere Texas hastened to provide as liberally for her deaf and dumb, as the oldest of her sisters; and now, those States within whose limits no institution for these unfortunates has yet been established, almost without an exception, avail themselves of the privileges afforded in neighboring asylums.

Not thirty years have passed since the philanthropic Howe opened in the old Bay State, with but six pupils, the first school for the blind in America; and already upwards of a score of institutions for the

education of this class are established in our land, in which pleasant homes are assembled nine hundred young immortals, whose eyes are closed to natural objects, but to whose mental vision are being vividly portrayed the beauties of the Gospel of peace, and to whose eager pursuit are now opened, even the treasures of literature, science and art.

Some of the pioneers in the work of educating the deaf and dumb, and the blind, are still in the vigorous exercise of all their faculties and powers, and still engaged in the work to which they have devoted the energies of a life. During the brief average of a generation they have been permitted to witness, not only the introduction, but the establishment and perfection of a system of education in our land, which furnishes, figuratively at least, ears to the deaf, a tongue to the dumb, and eyes to the blind. Under its influence pupils have been instructed, have passed through the necessary course of study, have bid farewell to their teachers, have left their asylum homes, and are now active, working, useful members of society, fitting well the stations allotted them, honoring their instructors, their country, and their God. Not a few also, there is every reason to hope, whose tongues were long silent on earth, or whose eyes were never opened on the glories of creation, are now mingling their voices with the angels of Heaven in triumphant songs of praise to the Most High God, and with sight undimmed are to behold His beauty and majesty forever and ever.

Results so glorious, so speedily attained, can but gladden the heart of the philanthropist and christian, and to be a citizen of a country where so much is done, so liberally, so cheerfully, for the unfortunate and afflicted, is surely a privilege scarce to be over estimated or valued.

And yet, while the despotic countries of Europe have for years ministered to the necessities of their unfortunate ; while private and public charity have freely lavished their bounty in every enlightened nation of the world on the deaf and dumb and the blind ; while their care in our own land has become a vital and essential portion of our noble system of popular education ; while millions of dollars have been expended by the several States to secure commodious and convenient dwellings for the accommodation of these classes, and hundreds of thousands are appropriated annually for their support ; while

the Federal Government, even, has opened its coffers in their aid, and granted rich endowments to State institutions for deaf mutes at the North and the South; and while Congress has munificently provided for the sick, the maimed, the infirm, and the insane in the District of Columbia; the first sun of the year just closed, dawned on a portion of our common country, under the special fostering care of our National Legislature, where works of beauty and magnificence had been reared at public cost; where nothing that could please the eye or gratify the sense had been neglected, but where the deaf and dumb and the blind were permitted to grow up in utter ignorance.

Within sight even of the grand edifice in which we are now assembled—if forms of beauty could have found an avenue through which to impress their minds—within sound of the notes of eloquence which have again and again from these halls burst forth and electrified the world—had they been potent to penetrate the barrier which closed their ears—blind and deaf mutes have lived uncared for; their very existence, far more their claim to public charity, and universal sympathy being utterly ignored.

But thank God, a brighter day is dawning! Within the past year benevolent men have associated themselves for the purpose of affording relief to this long neglected portion of our community. Few in number they have been zealous in their work, and encouraged by aid received from the last Congress, have gone forward in their undertaking and established an institution, which it is hoped has even in the few months of its existence thus far, fulfilled in some measure the benevolent designs of its founders.

The great object of institutions for the deaf and dumb, and the blind is not, as many have supposed, to afford asylums where these classes may be received and maintained as paupers for the balance of their lives. For as every truly benevolent act is designed to enable the recipient of bounty to help himself, so these schools aim at supplying, so far as may be, the deficiencies of sight and hearing to their pupils, and after a few years of constant and persevering instruction, to send them back into the world; able to contend successfully in the battles of life, and to take honorable places at the side of those who are in the complete possession of all their faculties.

Since the efforts already made in this direction have been crowned with such eminent success, as to put beyond all question the possibility

of reclaiming deaf mutes and blind from their normal condition of imbecility and dependence, to a state of active usefulness ; it will be unnecessary to detail at this time the course of training and instruction required to accomplish the desired end ; but it may be well to consider what has been done pecuniarily, to secure the results already attained.

The number of pupils graduated from the various institutions of this country, is about three thousand ; and the average cost of maintaining and instructing each individual has been estimated at not far from one hundred and eighty dollars per annum. The period which each child is allowed to remain at school is on an average six years and a half ; the cost then, to the country, of educating these three thousand, has exceeded three and a half millions of dollars.

The amount expended on buildings and lands, upwards of a million and a half of dollars, should not enter at all into an estimate of the cost of educating these pupils, since the edifices and grounds are by the rise in the value of real estate worth more to-day than when first devoted to the purpose they now serve, while they will also meet the wants of thousands yet unborn.

The rigid economist, or the unsympathizing man of the world may say : " why this vast amount expended on classes comprising so small a portion of the community ? "

Fathers ! mothers ! who may be within the sound of my voice to-night, have you a delicate, sickly, it may be a mute, or a blind child in your household ? Is not that one in its weakness and affliction the recipient of your choicest affections ? Do you not seek out various ways of mitigating the sorrows, and increasing the happiness of your stricken one ? Does not your heart throb more tenderly towards the little unfortunate, than for your other offspring, strong, hardy and well able to meet the rebuffs and troubles of life ? Why then should not we, rejoicing in the privilege of participating in such a charity, give liberally and labor earnestly, for those who so much need our sympathy and support to enable them to bear the trials and deprivations which an all wise Creator has seen fit to inflict upon them.

It is a principle in every enlightened community that the strong shall help the weak ; and who can lay a greater claim to assistance, than those whom the human voice in all its pathos and eloquence, has no power to move ; whose ears are closed to the sweet music of

art and the grander harmonies of nature ; or those to whom the glorious sunlight, the wonders of creation, the beauties of painting, sculpture and architecture, the faces and forms of friends, and the rich stores of learning treasured up in the printed page and volume, are shrouded in the eternal gloom of never varying darkness.

But feelings of sympathy and humanity aside, let us see if this outlay of three and a half millions of dollars on three thousand afflicted beings, has not been, in mere dollars and cents, an actual saving to the country.

None will deny that these mutes and blind, if left without education, would have been doomed to lives of pauperism, or at least would have been an unproductive portion of the community, dependent on the bounty of individuals or the State for support.

It is evident, also, that with education they become self-supporting ; that is after the three and half millions are expended, these three thousand cease to be dependent, and become at once productive. Naming the average age of these people at forty-five years, and the average cost of supporting each at sixty dollars per annum, we have an aggregate of eight millions one hundred thousand dollars; which they would have inevitably cost the country, had they been denied the privileges of education.

The amount actually saved to the country then, by the education of the deaf and dumb and the blind, in the manner at present pursued, may be easily estimated.

Adding to the cost in an institution, the expense of supporting the individual at fifty dollars per annum from infancy to the age, say of fifteen years, (the average at which pupils enter school) the whole cost of maintaining and instructing three thousand from birth to the period when they become self-supporting will be five millions seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The country, therefore, by being benevolent, and by providing for the education of these classes, is already made richer to the amount of nearly two and half millions of dollars.

And the National Legislature, by affording instruction in the District of Columbia to the classes represented here to-night, would not only be performing a laudable act of charity, but would be making an investment which in a few years would prove pecuniarily profitable, to say nothing of the rich reward promised hereafter to those who by giving to the poor "lend to the Lord."

Friends of the deaf and dumb and the blind, who by your presence on this occasion, manifest a kind interest in their behalf, their cause is before you.

As their advocate I plead: for sympathy, for kind consideration and for aid.

The persevering efforts of a few have brought the Columbia Institution to its present position; and though the hearts of these pioneers are still warm in the work, and their zeal unabated, the burden of sustaining the enterprise has become too heavy for them to bear alone: and unless assistance comes from some quarter, the institution must sink.

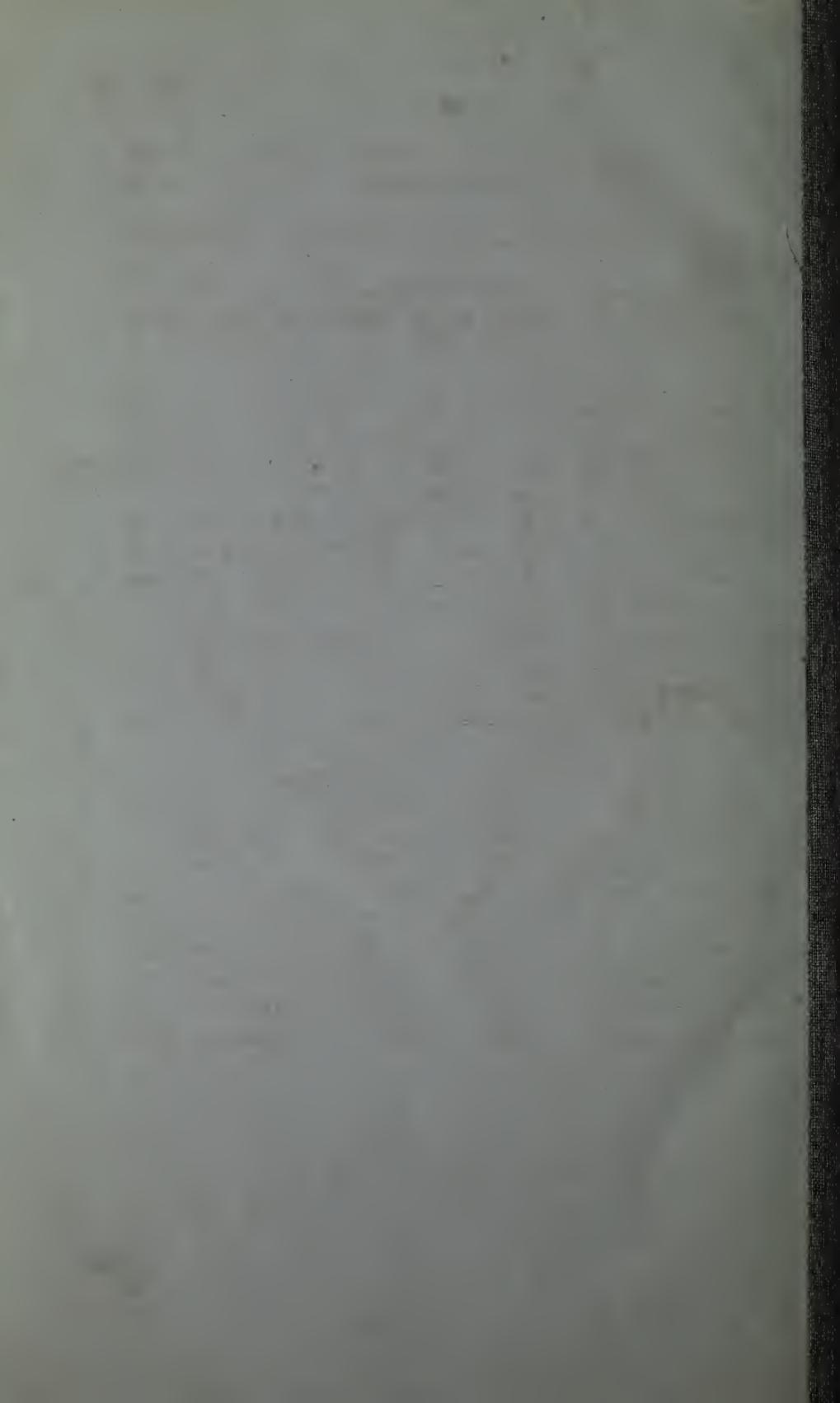
Shall it die? Shall the news be heralded abroad that Washington, the great heart of the nation, whose mighty pulsations carry life and impart vigor to the extremities of our federal system, is itself cold and stone-like, giving out no warmth in its immediate locality?

Shall the relentless pen of history record that in this year of grace, the American Congress heard, unmoved, the cry of the blind groping in darkness, under the very shadow of the Capitol walls, and looked un pityingly into the longing eyes of the dumb, heeding not their mute appeal for sympathy and succor?

Shall the afflicted children here to-night, into whose hitherto beclouded minds the first beams of intelligence have already found their way, be thrust back again to ignorance; the helping hand now extended to them being coldly withdrawn, and they left to struggle through life uninstructed and uncared for?

Shall the germ of immortality be undeveloped in this life and suffered to unfold and expand *only in an eternity of wretchedness and woe?*

It cannot be! It must not be! It will not be! Your hearts are too generous, your sympathies are too warm to permit the realization of so dark a picture. Fears and misgivings shall flee away from our minds and we will cherish only hopes, bright hopes for the future.



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Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN 21, 1908

